



countering violent extremism

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Report of the visit to the Transit Center and Refugee Camp Tabanovce

On April 10th 2017, as part of our CVE Project, the team of ZIP Institute had the chance to visit the Transit Center and Refugee Camp Tabanovce close to the town of Kumanovo and the border with the Republic of Serbia. Throughout the visit, we had the chance to take a glimpse into the accommodation facilities, the kitchens, water and sanitation facilities, as well as to look into the work and living conditions in the Center. Moreover, we met some of the people who live and work in the Center.

Similarly to our previous visit to the Transit Center and Refugee Camp Vinograd, before we went to visit the Center itself, we went to the local Crisis Management Center, so that we can pick up our visit permits and receive a little more logistical information with regards to the visit. The manager of the Center, Mr. Goran Stojanovski, informed us we will have a translator with us our disposal throughout the visit, and that Mr. Stojanovski himself will talk to us about the different aspects and challenges of managing this type of facility. **(You can read more about this in our interview with Mr. Stojanovski next week!)**

At the entrance of the Center Tabanovce we registered with the Ministry of Interior at their checkpoint, where we submitted our visit approval slips issued by the Crisis Management Center. Although we had delivered all necessary information so that we can be granted a photographing and recording permit for the duration of our visit to the Camp, we were not granted such permit, i.e. the permit was not delivered from the Ministry of Interior to the MOI Checkpoint at the Center itself.

While we were waiting at the checkpoint, we talked to the police officers that are providing the security to the Center. They said that the situation is fairly calm, without any larger incidents, although there have been quarrels and smaller incidents between the refugees and migrants, especially between those from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, and negativity towards the people from Morocco and Algeria. More often than not, the conflicts have ethnic, religious and national basis, because "The refugees from different states do not like each other. Usually, those from Syria and Iraq think that they are the most affected ones, and those from Afghanistan, Morocco or Libya take their places in Europe" said one of the police officers.

When we entered the Center, the Manager of the Center and the local Crisis Management Center, Mr. Goran Stojanovski greeted us. He gave us some general information about the Center, and introduced us to Mr. Vili, the translator who guided our visit through the Center.

Our first stop was the space of La Strada. They told us about their activities and programs with the Children in the Center, as well as the creativity workshops which aim at improving the creativity and creative processes of the children and youth, and they also told us that they organize showcases, exhibits and sales of the artwork of the people who reside and live in the Center. Furthermore, we talked about the different aspects of the immediate help that La Strada offers. More often than not, it is psychosocial help and counseling. When the Center was utilized by a larger number of people, there have been workshops on topics which would enable a better, safer process of transiting, such as workshops on the topic of recognizing and protection of human trafficking.

Our next stop were the UNICEF facilities. We even had the chance to meet a couple of the kids who currently reside in the Center. At the time of our visit, the number of underage persons was 9, whereas there were 14 people who would be categorized in the group of youth, teenage and adolescents. The educational processes are held in UNICEF's facilities; there are lecturers and teachers who come from outside and hold English and German language classes, as well as information technology classes, as these facilities are equipped with computers and internet connection.

We also had the chance to talk to one of the families who reside in the Center and are refugees from Syria. We spoke to Hadi Hasan, his wife Kurdi Ismail and their son Nevzad Hadi. The 4th member of the family, the older son is currently in Iran because the family did not have enough finances to fund his journey to Europe. An additional aggravating factor is that Hadi is physically disabled and has issues with one of his legs. They told us that they have paid insane amounts of money to be taken out of their country and they would like to go to Germany because of the good life conditions. They regularly communicate with their son and other acquaintances in Iran. They greatly miss Syria and they would love to go back home in peace. They are really bothered by the uncertainty of it all, as they have been residing in Tabanovce for year and a half.

Next, we spoke to some of the field volunteers who have been working since the beginning of the so-called refugee crisis. They told us of their experiences and the shock one faces when they meet more than 1.5 million refugees and migrants throughout the period of 2 years. With regards to our questions about incidents, they told us that besides the incidents that occurred when the Balkan Route was closed off in March 2016 and around 1500 migrants were stranded in the "in between zone", they have not faced any particular bigger issues.

Moreover, we got unofficial information that after the closure of the Balkan Route, there are still people who try to transit through the Republic of Macedonia to Serbia, but because they cannot cross the border, they have improvised their own accommodations near the villages of Vaksince and Lojane. These migrants and refugees are generally greeted with discontent and prejudices by the local population, which is also quite powerless with regards to the entire situation.

With regards to the health and wellbeing of the people who reside in the Center, the residents, if we could call them that, told us that there are people with bad health conditions but they have been transferred to Skopje (or other towns and cities) to relevant medical facilities. There are issues when the people who need medical care and attention are minor and are accompanied by a parent or a guardian, because the parents/guardians do not have the right to accompany their children to the hospital. We also got unofficial information that at the beginning of the influx of migrants and refugees, there were a lot of complaints due to the lack of medics and generally medical staff. Currently, at the Center there is a doctor, a nurse and a psychologist, and a gynecologist comes to the Center once a week.

As such, all the needs for the small number of people currently in the Tabanovce Center are satisfied. The only problem which is still persistent is the problem with regards to the gender-cultural barrier with regards to the medical staff.

As the time frame for our visit was relatively short, we moved towards the MOI checkpoint to collect our IDs and leave, leaving behind us people who are stuck in a constant cycle of uncertainty, families divided at two completely different sides of the world, and children with foggy dreams.



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What is it like to work at the heart of the refugee crisis?

An interview with a humanitarian worker

3rd of May 2017

What are the sexual and reproductive health facilities like?

In majority of cases, the hospitals or private doctors provide reproductive healthcare.

What are the educational facilities like?

Those enrolled, go to public schools on the islands, although this is a small percentage of children. In most cases, non-formal education happens in playgrounds or child friendly spaces.

What is the mental health state of people? Are there any appropriate facilities in which these issues are addressed?

In addition to the NGO's providing psychiatric and psychological support, the public mental institutions are also available for support.

What do you think of the process of community building in the camps? Seeing that usually the people living in the camps have lost their communities, support systems, sometimes even their closest family and friends, what do you think, how people find the community support?

The nuclear families are usually the support system for most cases. Those travelling alone, find company in the facilities accommodated.

Are there any resources over which there is always a fight (food, water, sanitation products, toys etc.)?

In the islands in which I operate, I haven't come across any big fights. Instead, the majority of the complaints are about the legal procedures...

What is the role of money in the camp? How do people exchange goods and services? Is there some sort of an internal system of exchange?

No. In some instances, where available, PoC's receive cash assistance from NGO's working on this.

What is the role of international organizations, humanitarian agencies, INGOs and local NGOs?

Each one of them has a different mandate and/or a different role. In almost all islands there is an inter-agency coordination mechanisms at place to avoid duplication of efforts, to coordinate for maximizing the effects of the services, etc

What is the role of local structures (municipalities, state ministries, police, military)?

The Ministry of Migration Policy, municipalities, police and army are all involved in the response within their mandates to ensure a safe, secure and dignified assistance.

We have seen many images of people fleeing home without anything but a telephone/smartphone. In your personal opinion, what is the role of smartphones and the internet in such places?

Smartphones have played a major role in the so-called 'refugee crisis' as its their only means to keep in touch with the people they have left behind or the people they aim to reunite with.

In your personal opinion, what would be the best/ fastest resolution for the refugees?

There is not a one-size-fits-all solution. As mentioned earlier, each person of concern has a different need, aspiration and background that needs to be addressed carefully by the stakeholders. In any case, I hope to see the war in Syria come to an end soon.

What languages do you speak? Have you experienced any particular troubles due to language/communication barriers?

I speak the local languages in Macedonia, English and a little bit of Italian. Of course, our job wouldn't be possible without the presence of translators, interpreters, cultural mediators on the ground.

Have you experienced any threats? What is the process of addressing personal threats?

None. As in any other country, you report it to the competent authorities.

What do you think is the biggest misconception, especially on the Balkans, about the refugees?

That these people pose a threat to the peace and stability of the Balkans is a misconception.



Prepared by: Jovana Perovska

